Raziek Mokhtari Dehkordi[1]

The visual and auditory representation of space and time in Roman Opalka's multimedia works

Abstract

Problem Definition: The formation of various arts is achieved based on a theoretical basis and these foundations have created operational differences between the arts for the performing way of the art work, thus becoming a significant basis for the artists with the new spatial and temporal changes. Meanwhile, the multimedia artists have formed a new field in which at least some studies have been conducted in Iran and the need to identify its obvious and hidden aspects is still felt. Classifying the types of multimedia art, the present study aims to investigate how the visual and auditory representations of the space and time are performed in Roman Opalka's multimedia works.

Objective: The aim of this article is to identify the concepts of space and time in the multimedia works of Roman Opalka as a case study as well as to explain the effect of visual qualities of these artworks.

Research Method: The present research has been conducted based on an analytical-descriptive approach and the required information has been collected using library method.

Results: Activating the realm of indexical signs, both visually and aurally, Opalka seeks to enhance the connection between the art and the world in a quasi-scientific way, preventing the works from being mere illusions. In addition, drawing the attention of the audience and art toward the existence and consciousness, Opalka attempted to provide a sense of the time invalidity through creating multidimensional readings. The time reading in Opalka's works is conducted in a linear and nonlinear manner and also the space and time in them are flowing and dynamic having metaphorical meanings such as the concept of death and declination.

1 Assistant Professor of Visual Communication, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Shahrekord University, Shahrekord, Iran.

razieh.mokhtari@sku.ac.ir

PAYKAREAH
Journal of Art Faculty, Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz
The visual and auditory representation of space and time in Roman Opalka's multimedia works
Volume 9. Issue 20. Page 48-56
49

Introduction

Roman Opalka (August 27, 1931 - August 6, 2011) was a French-born Polish painter whose artworks, although more related to conceptual art, is considered to be one of the oldest media-based multimedia works in the study; His works are a combination of different artistic media that the audience receives space and time in proportion to these two categories. Given that there are different interpretations for the concepts of space and time, we must first address what these concepts are in this article; "Space is an expanding yet pervasive field, and it is something that all artists deal with and that is felt in all works of art. But in the visual arts, some people consider space as one of the two-dimensional elements, while others consider it as a product of elements" (Oquirk, Stinson, Boone & Cayton, 2014, 259). The concept of space in multimedia art usually makes sense with the meaning of understanding place, time and objects and their relationship according to distances and dimensions, components and visual elements that make up a work. (Mokhtari Dehkordi, Nadalian, & Marathi, 2018, 22) Therefore, when the space of a work is studied, the overall effects of the work in all its material and content dimensions are included. On the other hand, time is a mental concept, which the human mind has discovered and uses to determine the chain of changes and changes. The concept of time, by its very nature, has complexities that stem in part from its fluidity and has occupied the mind of philosophy since ancient Greece. Although space and time seem simple and superficial in Roman Opalka's works, they have their own complexities that this article seeks to explore and identify these concepts. In this way, answer the following question: how is the visual and auditory representation of space and time in Roman Opalka's multimedia artworks.

Research Method

The present study is of fundamental type in terms of the purpose. Also, it has has been conducted in a descriptive-analytical manner and through library resources. In addition, some video documents consistent with the research components have been collected using online resources.

Research Background

In foreign backgrounds, no article or dissertation has been made about Roman Opalka as an independent multimedia artist. However, there are few books on conceptual art that mention only a small part of Roman Opalka as a conceptual artist. At least some studies have been done on multimedia art in Iran. Related studies include the article "Bakhtin temporal-spatial continuum in modern interactive art" (2011) by Giti Mesbah and "The nature of space and time in multimedia works Katie Patterson (2018) by Mokhtari Dehkordi, Nadalian, & Marathi. "Space and Time in Multimedia Art with Emphasis on the Works of Daniel

50

Steegman Mangrin and Alessandro Ravagnan" (2018) by Razieh Mokhtari Dehkordi and colleagues. But the author believes this No research has been done on Roman Opalka's works so far.
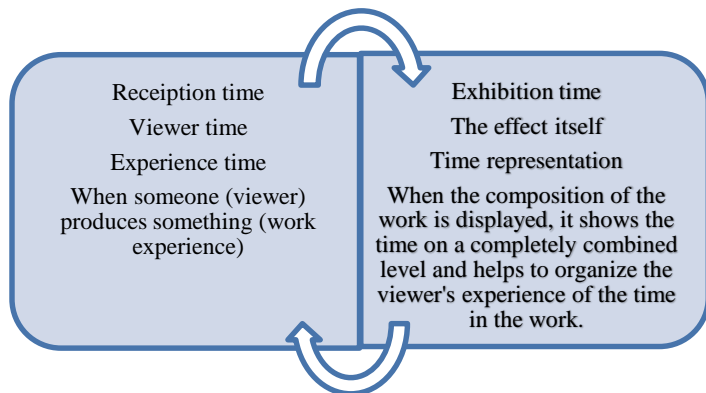
Theoretical framework of research

In general, we can enumerate three approaches to the study and explanation of Roman Opalka's multimedia works, which are briefly mentioned and introduced here. These three approaches are, a. Charles Sanders Pierce's semiotic approach Gottfried Boehm's hermeneutic approach. AJ Lessing approach. Unlike Saussure, who believed in two signs in each sign, he introduced a three-dimensional pattern and divided the signs into three categories, icon, indexical, and symbolic. (Table 1).

Table 1. Types of Signs in Pierce's Semiotic System Source: Author.

Iconic signs	It is a sign that is very similar to the subject or meaning mentioned. In iconic symbols there are always many similarities between the iconic sign and its reference, a photograph or a portrait of a painting is an iconic symbol of a person being represented.
Indexical signs	They refer to things that already exist or have developed in the work itself and are cause and effect. Smoke, medical imaging and symptoms such as fever, cough, etc. are all index symptoms.
Symbolic signs	The relationship between signifier and signified (reference and sign) is conventional. There is no similarity and no physical connection. The cross is a symbolic symbol used for Christianity, just as the white dove is a symbol of peace and the gun is a symbol of war. Source: Peirce, 1931, 158.

Gottfried Boehm discusses the relationship between temporal dimensions, including display time, reception time, and the mental experience of time, in "Image and Time", which can be considered as a temporal correlation and spatial distinction between workspace and viewer. Boehm emphasizes, however, that "display time" and "receipt time" are merged during the experimental process so that they can no longer be clearly identified (Chart 1).

Also, Lessing, in his famous comparison between painting and poetry in "Laocoon" (Laocoon or the limitations of poetry and painting), set a benchmark for the modern era topics (McClain, 2009). Here, with the Renaissance idea that painting is an art form which is given priority after poetry, Lessing concluded that painting has spatial, temporal, and narrative representations. Lessing in Laocoon believes that painting and poetry use fundamentally different methods in order to depict their subjects.

PAYKAREAH
Journal of Art Faculty, Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz
The visual and auditory representation of space and time in Roman Opalka's multimedia works
Volume 9. Issue 20. Page 48-56
51

Reception time
Viewer time
Experience time
When someone (viewer) produces something (work experience)

Exhibition time
The effect itself
Time representation
When the composition of the work is displayed, it shows the time on a completely combined level and helps to organize the viewer's experience of the time in the work.

Chart 1.
Dimensions of a work of art according to Gottfried Boehm Source: Ring Petersen, 2015, 19.

When Lessing observes the "time" as a factor in the two-dimensional art, he finally creates a polarization between space and time. Lessing benefits from this polarization to identify the two distinct aesthetic expressions, namely, the "synchronicity" or "coincidence" on the one hand and "consecutive time" or "progressive time" on the other hand (Mokhtari Dehkordi, Nadalian, & Marathi, 2018, 23) (Table 2).

Table 2. Temporal dimensions of works of art according to E G Lessing. Source: Author.

| Consecutive time	Synchronicity time
Poetry	Painting
Poetry is formed in time and is determined and understood by the audience through "progressive time" or in other words through "consecutive time".	Painting is an art form that is associated with freezing and shows an important moment by combining shapes in an illusory space and can be understood in one moment. According to Lessing, painting is essentially a form of spatial art characterized by "synchronicity."

Multimedia Art

As stated by Lucie Smith, multimedia art which is a new orientation of the visual arts, is "a term in the art of the twentieth century used for any combination of digital media, images, graphics, audio, video, animation and text" (Lucie Smith, 2004, 231). These media can include both traditional ones (such as the seven arts, including painting, sculpture, music, etc.) as well as those such as composition, performing arts, environmental art, video art and events (in general, new art media which have emerged in the twentieth century). The introduction of new technologies and electronic imaging technologies into the art world is also an important factor in the presentation of many multimedia works. Although the multimedia art has no clear and distinct border, Table 3 presents a classification of this type of art to make it easier to understand.

PAYKAREAH
Journal of Art Faculty, Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz
The visual and auditory representation of space and time in Roman Opalka's multimedia works
Volume 9. Issue 20. Page 48-56

52

Table 3: Separation of Multimedia Artworks. Source: Author.

Multimedia arts based on old media	There are arts that are created from the combination of several media such as sculpture, painting, text, video, etc., which are media in which the computer does not play a central role.
Multimedia arts based on new media	It is a combination of new art media such as digital art, listening art, interactive art and network art, etc. In these arts, computer has priority and the audience can receive through a user interface.

Visual and auditory exhibition of space and time in Roman Opalka's Multimedia artworks

Roman Opalka spent 45 years painting the sequence of numbers from 1 to infinity, a fundamental sequence with which he sought to depict the passage of time. This comet series began in 1965. In this year, the artist started painting the numbers 1,2,3, ... on the canvas using white paint. He started his first painting with number 1 on the top left of the canvas until the whole canvas is full, and reached the number 35327. The second canvas started right after the first one in which the first number was 35328 and this manner continued. All canvases were of the same size. The numbers were colored in white on a black background. In 1972, Opalka added white color to the black background to make it gray. In each new painting, he was adding the white amount to an extent of 1%. The result was an integration of numbers and a background which leads to white. Each painting was starting with a full brush and the brush was only placed inside the paint when there was no color left on. Hence, the color concentration changes are revealed (Figure 1). Opalka said at the 2007 Amsterdam Symposium on Personal Structures (Time): "All the devices we know as clocks says the time. However, I display the time, and this is something completely different". This is a painting solution to make it possible to depict time. To this end, numbers represent the progress, dynamism, integration and time expansion in the best possible way (Lodermeyer, 2010, 42). Opalka starts each image in the upper left corner, from left to right, and ends at the far right, using a number. The numbers are about 5 mm high, a size which is easily visible to the artist and he calls it "details". Each detail is a consecutive series that continues to infinity. However, Opalka's paintings were not just the series of numbers on the canvas, but show at least three salient aspects of his artworks and his interpretation of time. First of all, the viewer is faced with the background color of the canvas. While the numbers are drawn in white from 1 to infinity, the background color gradually changes over time. This change is part of the main idea that Opalka starts with a black background and adds 1% white color to each canvas background for the forthcoming years. Hence, he started works in such a way to be able to draw white numbers on a white background when he is 75 years old, through a quick mathematical equation. Opalka painted white on white for five
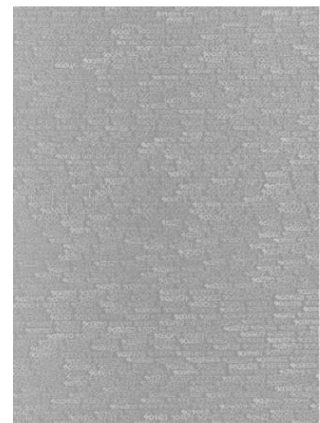
Figure 1.
Roman Opalka, Opalka 1965 / ∞-1 Details 918553-893147 (details), undated, acrylic on linen cloth, 196 135 135 cm. Goodwill: Samlung Lens Schوлnberg, Sol, Austria.
Source: ww.christies.com

PAYKAREAH

Journal of Art Faculty, Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz
The visual and auditory representation of space and time in Roman Opalka's multimedia works
Volume 9. Issue 20. Page 48-56

53

years until his death in 2011. White is definitely an issue for Him. He loves the idea of his hair whitening after years and eyes brightening. Talking to him in German also allowed a genitive: weissheit (white) or weisheit (wisdom). However, his views are not very clear. Opalka's position in this case seems to be combinative, "on the one hand, being aware of the shortness of life made him enjoy his life every day, and, on the other hand, completing his program for the artist is a sacrifice, in which he continued to paint numbers until he could no longer stand directly in front of his canvas" (De Jongh & Gold, 2010, 92). The second point is that Opalka, while painting his numbers, simultaneously records his numbers on a tape recorder with a loud and uniform sound. He speaks numbers in Polish, his native language. Like English, it made sense to announce numbers in Polish, The numbers were coming in order. The number "85" is therefore eighty-five in English, funf-und-achtzig in German or quatre-vingt-cinq in French. This method of creating numbers emphasizes the linearity and sequence over pure information. When his paintings were displayed, the sound of his voice were filling the gallery space and creating a thoughtful atmosphere. The sound for these exhibitions is a combination of different recordings of spoken numbers. The numbers are heard in a purposeful random order in order to reflect the common irregular thoughts. The artist chose this combination of sound and visual representation of the time because it was illustrating the combination of two times simultaneously, the linear time of painting and non-linear one repeated in the head as the person observing it. Opalka represents not only the passage of time but also the passage of life. Although his life span is also evident in his "details", the clearest ideas are captured in his self-portraits (Figures 2 & 3). At the end of each canvas in his studio, Opalka was using a camera to capture his face as a photo (Figure 4).
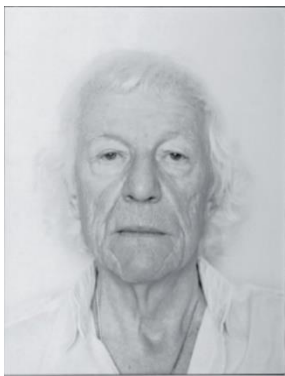
Figure 2.
Opalka novel, Opalka 1965 / ∞-1, photo, undated, photo, 242433 cm, courtesy:, Sol, Austria. Source: Dejong, 2010, 95.

Figure 3.
Opalka novel, Opalka 1965 / ∞-1, portrait, undated, photograph, 33 24 24 cm. Goodwill: Source: Dejong, 2010, 95

Figure 4.
Roman Opalka, Opalka 1965 / ∞-1, portrait, undated, photo, 33 24 24 cm. Goodwill: Samlung Lens Schۉnberg, Sol, Austria. Source: De Jongh, 2010, 95.

54

The photos were showing the face of the artist who wears the same white shirt and the same hairstyle. Since the visual aspects of the photos maintain high accuracy, the visual effect of the time is displayed. "By displaying the photos, Opalka takes his height as a reference and records his height change from 177 to 170 cm over time. Even if these photos are self-portraits, they are not just personal portraits. In his own words, "I do not talk about my life, I reveal life" (De Jongh, 2009, 236). Opalka's artworks are a historical monument towards emptiness. In an interview with Gold and De Jongh for Roman Opalka's art project (Time passage), he says: "My life is meaningless. My work is a statement of emptiness ... life has no meaning, and philosophers, in my opinion, should show that when you think very seriously, our existence is meaningless" (De Jongh & Gold, 2010, 58). The desire to declare this emptiness may arise from the Polish mentality of that time. As explained by the artist, Poland was a socialist country. The Polish socialist atmosphere played an important role in the development of the Opalka's concept. There were galleries in Poland that were independent of the capitalist credentials that "time is money". For the artists like Opalka, such galleries showed the freedom of trade. The artist saw this as an opportunity. Away from a commercial space, he claims that the artists deprived of liberty have used it in other parts of the world. He mentioned, for example, On Kawara, who started his "Today's collections" at the same time as the Opalka's project. For Opalka, time moves continuously and linearly without repetition. As Opalka told De Jongh at a meeting in Venice in April 2010, "he cannot even repeat the numbers on his tape recorder. For example, it is impossible to reconstruct a lost tape in which he said number 1,000,000, because his voice has changed over time. Opalka compares it with a river when he says "My work is something like a river, but the river has only one direction" (Lodermeyer, 2010, 41). This constant movement extends to infinity. Despite the infiniteness of time, Opalka acknowledged the starting point. This belief may have been rooted in Opalka's religious beliefs from the beginning, although we should not consider it in a purely spiritual way. For example, he talks about the big bang and even believes that there might be other big bangs, where the beginning lies, but it is not known. The artist illustrates himself as an agnostic. According to his paintings, he described number "1" as a big bang. However, according to Opalka, "1" is not just the beginning, but it is everything, a unit. The artist also argues that he can draw the painting after drawing "1", because his potential includes all natural numbers that come in sequence. Opalka added that the actual birth of the work is merely executive information and real resources are in the sense, identifying the history of which is difficult. Although the time is linear for Opalka, it is simultaneously detached from his life. Opalka's works indicate the progression of numbers from 1 to infinity. On the one hand, his multimedia works depict time as an independent moving being, and, on the other hand, the work refers to time itself, that is, it addresses the time in which we find ourselves, and the artist reveals the indicative signs of his works. His multimedia overlaps with the artist's life: "I have chosen my

PAYKAREAH
Journal of Art Faculty, Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz
The visual and auditory representation of space and time in Roman Opalka's multimedia works
Volume 9. Issue 20. Page 48-56

55

life as a period, the feeling encountered with which can be time. This is the work of someone who is freer than anyone else in the history. He reacts according to his existence, and thus it is also a reflection of the philosophy. For example, Heidegger's "existence" is present in my works" (Lodermeyer, 2010, 40).

Conclusion

This paper showed that Roman Opalka has created multimedia works with the aim of disturbing the linear and one-sided reading of the works through combining the different artistic media, such as photography, painting, the artist's own voice and the audience participation in the display space. He has employed various conceptual models to visually and aurally represent space and time in his works through the brush's paint concentration, adding 1% to the background of the works, progression and increment of the numbers from one to infinity, recording his own voice and taking his own picture. Opalka's multimedia uses the audience's senses, especially visual and auditory perception, to provide a consistent and simultaneous reading for the audience, and finally to induce time in a non-linear way and space metaphorically. The gradual progression of numbers is accompanied by a report on the physical life of the artist. The final disappearance of the counting mechanism with the disappearance of numbers in the background indicates the damping progress. Thus, time is generally perceived in response to the limitations of life, especially in comparison with the infiniteness of time. From a semiotic point of view, Opalka's works also seek to activate the realm of indicative signs. The painting of numbers, recorded sound, self-portraits and background colors of the works all refer to the painter himself and his life, and the age of the painter in a particular work can be estimated approximately. Finally, Opalka seeks to strengthen the connection between the art and the world in a quasi-scientific way by activating the indicative signs and pushing it out of the purely illusory area. The artist can also provide the audience with a sense of the invalidity of time by placing multidimensional readings. The audience can perceive the paintings through a series of visual methods or through synchronicity and considering the totality of the works, both aural and visual.

Refrences

- De Jongh, K & Gold, S. (2010). *Roman Opalka: Time Passing*. Netherlands: Global.
- Lodermeyer, P. (2010). *Personal Structures: Works and Dialogs*. New York: Global Art Affairs Publishing,
- Lucie Smith, E. (2004). *Art Terms (Dictionary of Art Terms)*. London: Thames& Hudson.
- Mokhtari Dehkordi, R; Nadalian, A & Marathi, M. (2018). The Nature of Space and Time in Katie Patterson's Multimedia Works. *Journal of Fine Arts-Visual Arts*, 23 (3), 21-30.
- Mokhtari Dehkordi, R; Nadalian, A & Marathi, M. (2018). Space and Time in Multimedia Art with Emphasis on the Works of Daniel Stigman Mangren and Alessandro Ravagnan. World. *Journal of Media*, 13 (2), 276-301.

56

- Mesbah, G & Rahbarnia, Z. (2011). Bakhtin temporal-spatial continuum in the new interactive art. *Journal of Comparative Art Studies*, 1 (1), 1-15.
- McClain, J. (2009). *Time in the visual arts: Lessing and Modern Criticism*. Copenhagen: Forlaget politisk revy.
- Ring Peterson, A. (2015). Installation Art: Between Image and Stage. *Distributed for Museum Tusculanum Press*.
- www.christies.com/features/Opalka-5583-1.aspx